

# Bearded Dragons & Stress

When you purchase a bearded dragon, or any pet, it may take some time for it to become acclimated with its new surroundings and feeding schedule due to relocation stress. As long as their environment is set up correctly, and they are receiving the proper care, relocation stress should only last a few days as they acclimate to their new surroundings. This usually takes 2-3 days but can last weeks in extreme circumstances. Most bearded dragons, and all other living things harbour low levels of various parasites, but they rarely cause any problems as long as the animal is healthy enough to keep them in check. Prolonged stress can lead to increased parasitic levels as the dragon does not have the resources to keep the levels low. It is important to remain patient during the first 2-3 days and keep the handling of your new dragon to a minimum until they get past the relocation stress period. Be sure to wash your hands before and after handling any reptile. Many of the chemicals that we use every day may be harmful to your dragon. Some reptiles may also carry pathogens, most commonly salmonella which they can get from the food & insects they eat. This does not mean that they are infected; it just means they carry the pathogen and are no more dangerous than cooking eggs or chicken unless it is allowed to infect you or your new friend.

**Stress may be demonstrated by any/all of these signs in bearded dragons.**

1. **Eating;** If your dragon will not eat when you receive it, or suddenly stops or reduces the amount they are eating it is usually a sign of stress. It is normal for a new dragon not to eat for a 2-3 days. This can sometimes take longer in rare circumstances. If your new dragon is not eating after 2 days you can try to feed them insects or fruits that are considered “treats” such as super worms, wax worms, butter worms, apples, kiwi fruit, peaches, etc. You can check out the food classification chart on our website for a more extensive listing of the foods commonly fed to bearded dragons. Incorrect temperatures in the enclosure can also cause your dragon to slow down or stop eating. You should check to make sure that the temperature of the basking area is at least 95-110 degrees, with the cooler end 70-80 degrees. Younger dragons may prefer a basking area that is as high as 120 degrees, and this is fine as long as there is a sufficient gradient for it to be able to escape the heat and cool down. For baby & juvenile dragons you may need to contact a veterinarian that specializes in reptiles if it is not eating after 3 days. In older dragons, usually over 1 year old, it may be that your dragon is bruminating. It is a basically reptile hibernation and may last several weeks. It usually occurs when the days get shorter and the temp gets colder. A lot of the signs of stress are also signs of brumination and they may include a reduction or stopping of eating and a reduction of activity. They may go to the darkest, coolest spot in their enclosure or even hide and not move for days to weeks. This is normal behavior and should be allowed to continue. It is possible to “force” them out of brumination by taking them out of their enclosure & handling them or giving them food and water. Not all bearded dragons will bruminate, it depends on the climate, lighting, and how often they are handled.
2. **Stress Marks;** Your dragon may display Stress Marks. These are dark lines or oval shapes that can appear on its belly and chin. It is a common sign on bearded dragons that you have recently acquired. The stress marks should go

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away in a few days once it has become accustomed to its new home. Check to make sure that the heating, lighting and diet are correct. Stress marks are completely normal and may also happen when your bearded dragon is cold, irritated, interested in something, and sometimes without any reason you can determine. At any rate, it is normal bearded dragon behavior and is nothing to worry about.

- 3. Decreased Activity;** If your new dragon is not very active and just lies around, it is usually a sign of relocation stress, and should pass in a few days. In older dragons it may also be a sign of brumination. A reduction in activity may also be caused by improper heating, lighting, or nutrition. When your dragon displays a reduction of activity, it is important for you to check the temperature, and the UVB. A lot of the self ballasted UVB bulbs will continue to produce visible light long after they stop producing UVB. If the bulb is over 6 months old, it should be checked to see if it is still producing a sufficient level of UVB, or replaced. You may have a pet store in your area, or know someone that has a UVB meter and who will check the bulb for you. Also make sure you are providing the proper nutrition for the age of your dragon. Young dragons get about 70% of their nutrition from insects and 30% from greens. This changes as the dragon ages and as adults they should receive about 30% of their nutrition from insects and 70% from greens. You can check the food classification chart on the resources & links page of our website to assure you are feeding the proper foods.
- 4. Change in coloration;** A change in coloration, usually an overall darkening, can be a sign of stress. It may also indicate that your dragon is ready to shed. Bearded dragons also change color based on their moods and the temperature. If your dragon is cold, they will darken their bodies to absorb more heat. Once again check the temperature in the enclosure. A dark beard may also be a sign of stress, but it is also a sign that they display for many other reasons.
- 5. Avoiding Basking;** If your dragon does not bask for several days it may be a sign of stress. They may also stay in the cooler end of the enclosure or in their hiding spot. In older dragons it may also be a sign of brumination. Check the temperatures in the enclosure to make sure there is a sufficient gradient for your dragon to cool down. The basking area should be at least 95-110 degrees, with the cooler end 70-80 degrees. If there is a sufficient gradient, you can move the basking light switching the locations of the cool end and the basking end.
- 6. Clawing at the enclosure;** You may notice your dragon clawing at the sides of the enclosure. This is usually caused by seeing their reflection in the glass and thinking it is another bearded dragon, or by actually seeing other bearded dragons in different enclosures. This can cause them to become stressed. If they are in an aquarium you can try to put a non-reflective background around the back & sides. It may also mean that the temperatures are too high since this will cause them to be more active. Check the temperature to make sure there is a sufficient gradient in the enclosure. The last thing that could cause your dragon to claw at the sides of the tank is that your dragon may just want to come out and play with you.